6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
Upper Liard

BELIEF AND THOUGHT

COSMOGONY AND THEOGONY

773 772 UPPER LIARD KASKA. Cosmological speculation remained unelaborated in aboriginal Kaska culture. Also, the limited material we collected on this topic makes it impossible to iron out inconsistencies and contradictions. A distinction between the sky and the earth obtained in pre-contact times,[1] and recognition of at least two periods of terrestrial habitation is implicitly revealed in cosmogonical narratives. The earlier period of the world antedates "true Indians." Perhaps it is then that "the animals were like people." At any rate, animals constituted the original earthly population. While they were still powerful (but not necessarily prior to human creation), there came a great flood that killed the monsters who threatened already existing people. Informants ascribed the flood to God who designed it to punish the people because they fought "all the time." Some Indians secured themselves by building a raft which the rising waters lifted until it came to rest on a mountain top. "You can still see the place where the raft came down. Here you can find big elephant [mammoth?] teeth" (X).[2] Following the flood Crow restored the world, the myth describing that event being the familiar Earth Diver tale. Today original creation is attributed to God, Tenatiia, a word probably designating a "rich and powerful person." Nobody regards God and Crow as identical. Informants could not say whether the idea of an anthropomorphic supreme being antedated European penetration of the Cassiar. They implied that Tenatiia had always existed but not as a supreme god. This, of course, does not mean that the ancestors of [177] the present day Kaska recognized Tenatiia as a deity. The evidence strongly suggests that the name was syncretized to designate the God of the Hebraic-Christian tradition.

773 539 Apparently not all the animals can be traced back to a prediluvian golden age. Beaver, for example, had to be created from human stock!

Originally there were no beaver in this country. A couple had one girl. These three were traveling but did not know how they would cross the creeks. At every creek except the last they found a bridge. The last creek they couldn't cross. They camped for the night and when they started the next day found that the girl was missing. But there was a beaver dam across the creek. Just as the father came up to it he saw a beaver swimming away and recognized his daughter. This was the first beaver (X).

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[1] In Tlingit belief "... the earth was conceived of as flat and the sky as a solid vault. Inside of and between these everything was alive with spirits . . . and some also resided upon the sky itself." Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 451.

[2] Field reports that the Pelly River Indians "have lots of old legends of the country being flooded, also of being covered with ice, another of the country being covered with ashes, and the trouble the people had at that time to live." (Field, *Unpublished manuscript* [1913], 16.) The flood tradition also is found among the Tlingit where a mountain top on Prince of Wales Island is pointed out as the resting place of the Indians who survived. (Jones, *Study of the Thlingets of Alaska* [1914], 188.) Swanton, also apparently perplexed by conflicting traditions, says, "Raven was the creator, or rather the organizor, of the present state of things." Swanton, *Social Condition, Beliefs and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (1908), 451.